

Program Title:

Fun outdoor activities

Suggested Grade Level:

3rd through 8th grade (some vocabulary modifications for younger students).

Materials:

One bandana per each pair of students (2 students share one bandana)

4 containers with lids (cleaned empty mayo jars, small cleaned film canisters, etc)

1 bag of cotton balls

4 McCormick food flavorings, (strong flavors like peppermint, lemon, coconut, etc.)

4, 1 foot long pieces of metal like a wire hanger, cut into 1 foot sections

1 roll of colored plastic tape (for flagging an area)

Preparation:

Take a few cotton balls and soak them with food flavorings.

Place cotton balls in containers (one flavor per container only, so that you end up with 4 jars each with its distinct smell).

Cover the containers, place them around the playground or park.

Place one homemade 'flag' (a one foot piece of cut wire hanger, with a small piece of colored plastic tape tied or taped to it) near each of the 4 containers with flavor.

Procedure:**Activity #1 Go Hug a Tree!**

You will need a large spacious area with several trees around.

Team each student with another (always a good idea to separate friends, encourage your students to work with someone 'new')

Once everyone is teamed up, have one team mate tie a bandana around the eyes of their partner.

Explain the rules about safety and trust.

Have the teams lead their blindfolded partner over to a tree, remembering to be very careful around exposed roots (trip hazard) and any low hanging branches.

Each partner is to guide the hands of the blindfolded partner to the tree and have them feel the bark up and down, feeling the crevices and the rough or smooth texture of the bark. If a leaf is accessible, have the partner hand the blindfolded student a leaf of the tree to feel, noting the edges of the leaf (smooth or serrated) and the texture.

The partner then carefully guides the blindfolded student back to the center circle where the program began.

The blindfolded person is carefully turned in a circle a few times to confuse them, and then removes the blindfold.

That person is now charged with trying to locate 'their' tree with no help from the partner.

The following questions can be open for discussion:

How long did it take? Was it difficult or easy? What species of tree is it? Do animals use this tree? Are there any birds nests?

How are trees important to humans? How old is this tree? How can we tell the age of a tree?

Activity #2 *Homing Sweet Homing*

You'll need 4 adults or 4 student volunteers.

Background: Many animals migrate in the winter months. Animal migration occurs horizontally, as with many bird species that fly across our nation's skies to wintering grounds. Concurrently, other animals migrate vertically as with the case of our amphibian and reptilian friends. Frogs, snakes, and turtles for example burrow down into the soft muddy bottoms of ponds or wetlands. Scientists have a spectrum of theories about animal migration and return or homing. Some scientists believe that animals return home through the use of visual clues (tops of buildings, unique topography), some scientists believe it is the sense of smell that enables an animal to return home and interference with the sense of smell can obstruct the journey (an-osmosis = Greek, 'without smell'), finally others believe in music resonance which is the paranormal belief that animals 'just know' which way is home.

This activity gets students thinking about the use of the senses (specifically the sense of smell) and enables a spring discussion on homing and migration.

Have each of the students line up in 4 single file lines. Each of the 4 lines will have one teacher (or one student volunteer) at the front facing the line with one flavored container in hand.

Instruct the students that they are supposed to smell one smell only and once they're done, to go to the back of the line and wait until everyone is finished smelling.

Once the students have imprinted (like salmon!) on their smell, have them all turn their backs on the 4 teachers/volunteers. When no one is looking, scramble all the 4 smells and place them in 4 corners of the park or playground where all 4 flags are located.

Then explain the safety rules (no running, etc.) and tell them they now have to smell ALL 4 of the smells and determine which of the smells they imprinted upon, or which one represents their 'home'. Tell them if they think they've found their home to stand by the flag. Do a count down and set them free.

Once everyone is now standing by their 'home' flag, ask for the honor system, "Who thinks they've really found home?" "Who had trouble finding home?" "What obstacles would inhibit an animal to find their way home, back to their summer grounds?"

Activity #3 Nature Scavenger Hunt

Create a list of objects that your students can collect with a time limit. Make this list consist of elements from aerobic and anerobic sources, like feathers, rocks, insects, branches, etc. When they come back to home base with all of the objects on the list, instruct the students to tell the group where the object came from (aerobic or anerobic) and name one way humans use the resource of the object, and one small or large method to sustain the resource.

Extension:

Here are some other hands-on activities for students during *No Student Left Inside*:

- Research information from the DNR, Forest, Mineral, Fire, Management Division on the *Adopt a Forest Program*. Your students can take pride in helping to clean up an area of forest used as a dumping ground for trash and furniture by fellow Michigan citizens.
- Plant trees
- Start a nature trail or a nature garden right outside your school
- Make bird houses
- Paint an outdoor nature mural on an outdoor wall of an approved building at the school
- Have students each make a nature discovery box (cardboard box sealed except for one round hand-sized hole with an element of nature inside, like a pine cone, acorn, feather, blades of grass, etc.) They can create a box and once completed, go outside to find a little bit of nature to place inside, keeping their find a secret from other students. Once all the boxes have something found in nature placed inside and are sealed, line up all the boxes outside and have each of the classmates feel what's inside and guessing what is inside each of the nature discovery boxes.
- Hold a bake sale for your school to purchase a 2007 State Park sticker for the community field trip school bus!

